

# Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

# ENR NEWS

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For Immediate Release

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The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's involvement in Cahokia's Burning Ditch (Dead Creek) was slow in developing. The Agency received initial reports from area residents in May of periodic smoldering of materials in the ditch between Queeny Avenue and Judith Lane. At that time the incident did not appear to be of a serious nature, and the Agency assigned it a low priority.

That all changed on August 27 when it was learned that Peter Laumann's dog rolled in the ditch and died of apparent chemical burns. Preliminary samples taken in the ditch revealed hazardous levels of phosphorous, heavy metals and PCB's along the half-mile of ditch between the two streets.

Subsequent soil samples ~~taken on September 16 and 17 of soil in the ditch~~ substantiated earlier results, (see attached table). At that time water samples were taken from three private wells plus a pond adjacent and connected to the ditch.

Samples from the wells were analyzed and showed normal levels of metals. Analysis of the same wells for organic chemicals were negative for two but the well at 101 Walnut Street adjacent to the pond showed low levels of chlordanes, PCB's and alkylbenzenes.

Analysis of the pond water showed normal levels of metals with low levels of PCB's and aliphatic hydrocarbons which are petroleum products such as motor oil.

# Sauget site investigated for toxic chemicals

By PATRICIA SZYMCAK  
Globe-Democrat Staff Writer

**SAUGET** — Illinois authorities are investigating a Sauget site where they believe toxic chemicals from a landfill used as a dumping ground for industrial wastes for more than 40 years may endanger the ground water. The Globe-Democrat has learned.

Michael Maury, director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, confirmed his agency is looking into reports that the late Leo Sauget, the first mayor of the town that bears his name, operated an immense landfill southeast of Dead Creek, which is a smoldering, glowing ditch polluted with cancer-causing chemicals and toxic metals.

"There's a better than 90-95 chance something's there," Maury told The

Globe-Democrat. "We're taking it very seriously, but we're not going to stick an auger in it and chance hitting something."

EPA SCIENTISTS will release results of an analysis of water samples taken from private wells in the Cahokia area of Dead Creek at a news conference Wednesday.

But, while Maury said a favorable finding "will be good news for the private well users, it does not mean that (chemical pollutants) haven't gotten into the ground water."

"We'll be doing more tests later in the Sauget end," near where a 3-acre landfill reportedly was operated south of Quincy Avenue and west of Falling Springs Road from early in the century until the mid-1960s.

Reports of possible dumping of toxic waste at the site allegedly operated by

the former mayor of Monsanto (the town was renamed Sauget in 1968) surfaced following revelations that the dried up Dead Creek nearby contains high levels of cancer-causing PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), pesticides and 30 metals.

**MAURY TOLD THE GLOBE-DEMOCRAT** the EPA does not know if the dump is the source of the Dead Creek pollution, or if it is a situation the agency will have to treat separately.

"We don't want to be alarmed because we don't know what's there," Maury said.

Ann Carr, assistant Illinois attorney general for pollution cases in the southern part of the state, said her office is watching the EPA investigation closely and is prepared to prosecute when the person responsible is found.

Lauman investigated the ditch and found the soil smoldering and hot to the touch. He said he later developed the same blood-red rings on his finger tips he had found on his dog after it had run in the ditch.

"IF YOU TAKE some healthy dirt and throw it in, it melts," Lauman said. "I've had the fire department out here to hose it down so often, they're getting tired of it. But, as soon as they start rolling up the hoses, the ditch is dry and smoldering again."

Lauman said he gets headaches frequently if he sits in his yard for a long time. A friend who visited him one day developed a case of swollen glands, he said.

"It gets so bad that you gag," Lauman said. "You have to keep the windows closed and the air conditioner on."

Officials at Monsanto Co., a mile north of Lauman's property, deny they have been involved in any hazardous dumping.

"MONSANTO sent two inspectors to the scene when it first heard of it and could not establish a connection between the smoking ground and the plant," a spokesman for Monsanto in St. Louis said. "We handle all our materials in a very proper and legal manner."

Officials at Cerro Copper Co. and Edwin Cooper Inc., also upstream from the Laumans, were unavailable for comment.

"Whatever is there has been there for a number of years and conditions occurred that just made what happens happen," said Nick Mahlandt of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency office in Collinsville.

**AMBER AND** green dirt samples collected from the ditch do not burn unassisted in the laboratory, prompting agency officials to assume they are dealing with a chemical compound that has built up through the years.

"We've never seen anything like it," Kelly said. "It won't respond to our analysis techniques."

Meanwhile, youngsters continue to ride their bicycles down the slopes of the ditch and are often chased out by Lauman, who says he will "stay put" until the mystery is solved.

"I love this house and I really hate to give it up," Lauman said. "I may have to sell and take a killing on it. But if I can pinpoint who's responsible, there's going to be a suit."

The attorney general's office has "a suspect" in the Dead Creek case, but as yet has not begun an investigation of the source of material in the nearby landfill, she said.

"We're talking about a time when people buried the stuff and I thought it would all go away," Mrs. Carr said, adding that industries that generated the waste products usually are used if the dumper cannot be found or is unable to pay.

**SOURCES CLOSE TO THE EPA** say the agency may have to use an electronic "treasure hunter" device to determine if large quantities of metal exist below the surface, because of fears that drilling in the area could release toxic wastes that might otherwise remain encased in 55-gallon drums.

EPA officials have no record of a

dump at the site, which was allegedly closed before the General Assembly passed laws requiring landfill operators to register with the state. The first rules governing such registration were passed in 1966 by the Illinois Department of Public Health and are now enforced by EPA.

But, Cahokia firefighters recall numerous blazes near the area in the 1950s and early 1960s that sometimes caused their department to be called to assist Sauget fire officials.

A retired assistant chief of the Cahokia fire department told The Globe-Democrat he responded to fires in a dump south of Quincy Avenue across from what is now the Sauget Village Hall, and once fought a blaze in Dead Creek itself.

"I COULDN'T SAY what it was (burning). But it was something out of

the ordinary," he said. "It was just a nasty hole. The fires were harder to control."

G. Thomas Duffy, a former managing editor of the now defunct Metro-East (East St. Louis) Journal, remembered stories of nearby residents who claimed to have gotten sick from odors wafting across the fields surrounding the landfill.

"There were a great number of objectors to it," Duffy said.

Mrs. Carr said her office has learned that more than one old landfill may exist in the Sauget area, but that report has yet to be confirmed.

Despite repeated efforts by The Globe-Democrat, Paul Sauger, who succeeded his father as mayor of the town, could not be reached for comment Monday.

## Something strange lurks in dirt of 'dead creek'



Globe-Democrat Photo by Bill Brinson

Pete Lauman walks along the smoldering earth.

### The dirt glows in 'dead creek'

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May when he received a call from Pete Lauman.

Lauman and his wife had been living in their new home at 105 Judith Lane only a few weeks when they found their prize show dog dead one morning, his skin eaten away by a mysterious substance he had rolled in the night before.

"THE BIG MALE and the pup were chasing each other in the back yard and he apparently rolled in the dirt in the ditch," Lauman said. "He came in covered from head to toe with some of the funniest substance I'd ever seen."

"We washed him off, but the next morning I found him dead by a tree in the back yard. His skin had deteriorated to the bare bone tissue and when I opened his mouth, it was all white and crumbly."

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Cahokia residents call it "dead creek."

The ditch is south of the heavily industrialized sections of Sauget, and was reportedly used in the past for dumping chemical wastes.

The past is apparently coming back to haunt neighbors of "dead creek."

It's been five months since chemists from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, in Springfield first began analyzing samples of dirt taken from the ditch that witnesses say smolders almost continuously and glows at night with a purple-blue flame.

**AGENCY CHEMIST** James Kelly plans to inspect the phenomenon next week. He said officials have yet to determine the chemical nature of the dirt.

"We're puzzled," Kelly said. "We know it reacts with air, but we don't know what it is. We don't know if it's toxic and, quite frankly, we're hoping it just goes away."

Tonie Townsend, public health officer in Cahokia, said he was first made aware of the problem in

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